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PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1998-1999

First report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions*

PART V. REGIONAL COOPERATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

V.1. The Secretary-General's estimate for part V of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 amounts to $399,362,600, comprising a total of $90,771,600 for sections 16A, Economic and social development in Africa, and section 16B, Regional Commissions New York Office; $73,408,100 for section 17, Economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific; $49,310,800 for section 18, Economic development in Europe; $90,245,500 for section 19, Economic and social development in Latin America and the Caribbean; $49,704,800 for section 20, Economic and social development in Western Asia; and $45,921,800 for section 21, Regular programme of technical cooperation.

V.2. During its consideration of the budget proposals for the regional commissions, the Advisory Committee observed that a number of elements are common in all of the budget submissions.

V.3. The budget submissions for the regional commissions should have indicated activities and services that were initially envisaged for the biennium 1996-1997 but were postponed to 1998-1999 in order to meet the budget reductions (see chap. I, para. 12).

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* The present document contains part V of chapter II of the first report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999. Chapter I has been issued as Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 7

(A/52/7). The complete first report will be issued as Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 7 (A/52/7/Rev.1).

V.4. The Advisory Committee points out the lack of uniformity in the presentation of programmes of activities of the regional commissions. While the budget submissions for the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) include a number of substantive activities under programme support, the submissions for the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) list under programme support only traditional support functions such as administrative, conference and library services and common support services. The Committee recommends that the format of presentation of programmes of activities of the regional commissions should be reviewed with a view to delineating more clearly substantive activities vis-à-vis programme support and harmonizing the budget presentation.

V.5. Moreover, the Advisory Committee points out that the methodology for arriving at the estimated percentage distribution of total resources within a budget section between the programme of work and programme support needs to be further refined. The Committee notes that the level of resources proposed for programme support in some regional commissions continues to be high in relation to resources requested for the programme of work. In this regard, the Committee reiterates its view contained in paragraph V.7 of its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997[1] that the requirements for programme support should have been considerably lower and that the resources thus released could have been diverted to substantive activities.

V.6. The budget submissions for the regional commissions should indicate more clearly the extent of review by intergovernmental organs of the programmes of work of the commissions and their various organizational and institutional issues, including intergovernmental structures. The results of such reviews should be summarized, preferably in a table, indicating the main changes in the number of intergovernmental bodies and changes in conference-servicing requirements, including the number and duration of meetings. The budget submissions should identify the financial implications resulting from intergovernmental reviews, as well as proposed re-allocation within the same budget section of released resources to other priority issues. Furthermore, all increases in requirements resulting from intergovernmental reviews should also be indicated in the budget submissions.

V.7. In the course of its consideration of part V of the proposed programme budget, the Advisory Committee was informed that a number of publications proposed for the biennium 1998-1999 were initiated by the secretariats of the commissions. The Committee recommends that future budget submissions identify publications initiated by the secretariats, including studies to be undertaken by consultants. Furthermore, the Committee recommends that future budget submissions indicate more clearly intended users of United Nations publications, both recurrent and non-recurrent. The Committee also reiterates its view reflected in paragraph 76 of its first report on the proposed budget for the biennium 1996-1997[1] that the Secretariat should indicate to the relevant intergovernmental bodies the number, type, cost and audience of each

publication, the date intended for publication, the date when each publication was first requested, who requested such publication, when it was last reviewed and by whom.

V.8. The Advisory Committee notes the trend for significantly increasing resources for consultants and experts in the regional commissions: ECA - 47.7 per cent, ECLAC - 44.5 per cent, ECE - 12.7 per cent, ESCWA - 16.8 per cent and ESCAP - 8.1 per cent. In this connection, the Committee draws attention to its comments and observations in paragraph 83 of chapter I and points out also that requirements for consultants in future budget submissions should be prepared in accordance with such guidelines which the General Assembly may wish to establish as a result of its consideration of the report of the Secretary-General on the comprehensive policy guidelines on consultants to be submitted in accordance with section VI, paragraph 4, of Assembly resolution 51/226 of 3 April 1997.

V.9. In connection with the proposed redeployment of posts and non-staff resources from UNCTAD to the regional commissions, the Advisory Committee points out that the budget submissions should have identified all resources proposed for redeployment between budget sections. The Committee recommends that the next budget submissions indicate, explain and justify all proposed redeployments of posts and non-staff resources between budget sections.

V.10. The description of activities and services of the regional commissions should be presented more clearly to permit a quantitative and qualitative monitoring of programme implementation. The activities to be performed by the regional commissions include coordination, cooperation and liaison, although in most instances it is not possible to ascertain by what means and at what cost they will be accomplished. The Advisory Committee recommends that the description of international cooperation and inter-agency coordination and liaison be significantly improved so that Member States are provided with a clear picture of how these activities relate and contribute to other quantifiable and/or identifiable mandated activities.

V.11. The Advisory Committee notes that proposed estimates for travel in the budget submissions for ESCAP, ECE and ECLAC show various rates of growth (13.5 per cent for ESCAP, 3.9 per cent for ECE and 0.4 per cent for ECLAC). The Committee recalls, in this connection, its earlier observation that with the advent of technological innovations and the on-line availability of information, expenditures in this area could, in some cases, be considerably lowered.[2] The Committee reiterates its position on this matter and requests that additional measures be taken to reduce travel costs in ESCAP, ECE and ECLAC in future budgets.

V.12. The budget submissions do not currently allow for objective analysis of the ratio of General Service support posts to Professional posts, since some staff occupying General Service posts perform functions other than clerical. The budget submissions should also have contained information on gratis personnel. The Advisory Committee recalls the provision of General Assembly resolution 51/243 by which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to phase out expeditiously type II gratis personnel, as well as Action 3 of the Secretary-General's measures and proposals for reform contained in his report on

renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform (A/51/950) in which it is stated that a plan will be developed to phase out the use of gratis personnel in the Secretariat at the earliest possible date. The Committee recommends that information on all types of personnel should be readily available in the context of the its review of a proposed programme budget.

Section 16A. Economic and social development in Africa

V.13. As shown in table 16A.1 of the proposed programme budget, the regular budget estimate for section 16A for 1998-1999 amounts to $89,552,300, showing an increase of $1,568,300 over the 1996-1997 appropriations. The extrabudgetary resources of ECA for the biennium 1998-1999 are estimated at $15,840,600, which reflects a decrease of $536,100 compared with 1996-1997 estimates.

V.14. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 16A.7 that the growth of 1.9 per cent in proposed regular budget resources represents the combined effect of the delayed impact of the posts established in 1996-1997 (2 P-3 and 3 Local level posts), the application of new standardized vacancy rates, the redeployment from UNCTAD of two Professional and one Local level posts, increases and decreases under various non-post objects of expenditure and the proposed abolition of 15 Professional and 40 Local level posts. The Committee was informed that 44 Professional and 36 Local level posts were vacant in ECA as at 30 April 1997.

V.15. As indicated in table 16A.3 the total number of extrabudgetary posts proposed for the biennium 1998-1999 is 62, compared with 60 posts for the biennium 1996-1997. The net increase of two extrabudgetary posts reflects an increase of three Local level posts under programme support which is partly offset by a decrease of one Professional (P-5) post under programme of work.

V.16. As can be seen from the table in paragraph 16A.7, the Secretary-General estimates that of the total resources proposed under section 16A, 55.8 per cent of regular budget resources and 80.8 per cent of extrabudgetary resources would be spent on activities relating to the programme of work, while 40.6 per cent of regular budget resources and 16.3 per cent of extrabudgetary resources would be required for programme support. The Advisory Committee notes that resources for some substantive activities are currently shown under programme support (for example, activities indicated in paragraphs 16A.91 (a) and (b)), while some resources for administrative support are included under programme of work (for example, each subregional development centre has one Professional staff at the P-2 level dealing with administrative support and their costs are included under programme of work). In this connection, the Committee draws attention to its recommendation in paragraph V.4 above.

V.17. As indicated in paragraph 16A.5 of the budget submission for ECA, the number of substantive divisions has been reduced to five and 55 posts are proposed for abolition as a result of the streamlining of the programme of work and the restructuring of the secretariat. Part of the resulting savings will be used to increase resources in four areas: (a) consultants, (b) ad hoc expert group meetings, (c) data-processing equipment and (d) general operating expenses.

V.18. The Advisory Committee points out, in this connection, that it finds the distinction between substantive and non-substantive divisions of ECA to be somewhat blurred. As can be seen from paragraph 16A.91 of the budget submission, the three divisions which fall under the category "programme support" also perform a number of substantive functions, such as substantive servicing of meetings, preparation of parliamentary documentation and international cooperation and inter-agency coordination and liaison. The Committee requests, therefore, that a management review of functions currently assigned to all divisions of ECA be undertaken by the Executive-Secretary with the view to establishing clear and transparent lines of responsibility between the divisions dealing with substantive and programme support functions.

V.19. As indicated in paragraph 16A.5 of the proposed programme budget, the increased allocation of resources to consultants, ad hoc expert group meetings, data-processing equipment and general operating expenses will give ECA greater flexibility in programme implementation. According to the Secretary-General, the use of consultants and experts would also provide ECA staff the opportunity to train so as to eventually be able to carry out many of these functions themselves. The Advisory Committee points out, in this connection, that in order to ensure an effective transfer of knowledge and expertise from short-term consultants and experts to ECA staff, deliberate management action to promote training needs to be taken by the ECA administration, since mere interaction with experts is unlikely, in the view of the Committee, to result in a tangible increase in staff knowledge.

V.20. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 16A.5 (d) that the increase in resources for general operating expenses will be used primarily to strengthen the multinational programming and operational centres (MULPOCs), which have been renamed subregional development centres. Moreover, as stated in paragraph 16A.25, a particularly important measure aimed at enhancing the impact of the work of the Commission is decentralization of staff and activities to the subregional level. About 25 percent of all ECA staff will be deployed to the five subregional development centres.

V.21. The Advisory Committee welcomes the attention of the administration of the Commission to the needs of the subregional development centres and requests that effective steps be taken to ensure that qualified staff are assigned to the centres and that operating facilities, including enhanced communications and computing capacity, are provided.

V.22. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 16A.6 that the programme of work of ECA for the biennium 1998-1999 reflects a further consolidation, which resulted in a reduction of the current nine subprogrammes to that of five priority areas of activity. As indicated in paragraph 16A.22, the Commission's programme of work for the biennium 1998-1999 is derived from the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001[3] and is based on the new programme structure approved as part of the reforms launched since mid-1995.

V.23. Information on the structure of policy-making organs of ECA and on the pattern of their meetings is contained in paragraphs 16A.8 to 16A.10. During its deliberations, however, the Advisory Committee was informed that as a result of the restructuring of the intergovernmental organs of ECA, the following

subsidiary bodies were proposed for abolition: (a) the Conference of African Ministers responsible for Human Development; (b) the Conference of African Ministers responsible for Sustainable Development and Environment; (c) the Conference of African Ministers responsible for Trade and Regional Cooperation and Integration; (d) the Conference of African Ministers of Transport and Communications (in 1999); (e) the Conference of African Ministers of Industry (in 2001); (f) the United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Africa; (g) the African Regional Conference on Science and Technology; and (h) the Joint Conference of African Planners, Statisticians, Demographers and Information Specialists. A new structure of intergovernmental bodies of ECA, as proposed by the Conference of African Ministers at its thirty-second session, held in May 1997, is as follows:

Legislative organs dealing with overall development issues

1. Conference of African Ministers responsible for Economic and Social Development and Planning (the Commission) and its Technical Preparatory Committee of the Whole (biennial)

2. Follow-up Committee of the Commission (biennial - inter-sessional years)

3. Intergovernmental Committee of Experts of the five subregional development centres (annual)

Conferences of Ministers

1. Conference of African Ministers of Finance, and its Committee of Experts (biennial)

2. Conference of African Ministers of Transport and Communications (biennial) - to be abolished in 1999

3. Conference of African Ministers of Industry (biennial) - to be abolished in 2001

Subsidiary bodies

1. Committee on Women and Development (biennial)

2. Committee on Development Information (biennial)

3. Committee on Sustainable Development (biennial)

4. Committee on Human Development and Civil Society (biennial)

5. Committee on Industry and Private Sector Development (biennial)

6. Committee on Natural Resources and Science and Technology (biennial)

7. Committee on Regional Cooperation and Integration (biennial)

V.24. The Advisory Committee was also informed that the new intergovernmental structure of ECA had been approved by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1997/5 of 18 July 1997. The necessary revisions will be reflected in the final document of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999.

V.25. The Advisory Committee welcomes and commends the efforts of the Commission to streamline its structure and to set up new modalities for programme delivery. In this connection, the Committee notes that there will be fewer reports and a reduction in the number and frequency of meetings, as reflected in paragraph 16A.25. The table below, which is based on information provided to the Committee, illustrates some of the reductions:

	1996-1997 (1)	1998-1999 (2)	(2) to (1) (percentage)
Intergovernmental reports	109	44	40.4
Recurrent publications	49	33	67.3
Non-recurrent publications	119	82	68.9

V.26. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that a significant number of both recurrent and non-recurrent publications are initiated by the ECA secretariat and are later presented to the intergovernmental machinery, often in the context of the work programme; moreover, a large number of publications will be based on studies to be prepared by outside consultants and experts (examples of such publications are indicated in paragraphs 16A.51 (b) (ii) and 16A.54). In this connection, the Committee draws attention to its recommendation in paragraph V.7 above on the need to identify publications and studies to be undertaken by consultants.

V.27. The Advisory Committee also notes from paragraph 16A.25 that to enhance the quality of its documents, ECA will improve content by more vigorous technical editing and peer review and that such activities will be complemented by periodic surveys to measure client satisfaction. While welcoming this intention, the Committee points out that this should have resulted in reductions in resource requirements for printing, translation, reproduction and editing. However, more resources are being requested for these activities. The Committee also draws attention to its recommendation in paragraph V.7 above on the need to clearly identify intended users of United Nations publications.

V.28. The Advisory Committee notes the proposed abolition of two P-3 translator posts. At the same time, the Committee notes from paragraphs 16A.38 and 16A.82 that a total amount of $225,400 is proposed under contractual services for outside translation and editing. The Committee was not provided with a convincing justification for the proposed abolition of the two posts and therefore questions this proposal.

V.29. A provision of $36,700 is requested for the training of two translators (see para. 16A.97). The Advisory Committee recalls, in this connection, that

the Commission had initiated in the biennium 1992-1993 a revival of a training programme for translators/precis-writers in accordance with the requirements of section II of resolution 45/248 B of 21 December 1990.[4] Considerable resources have been spent on the programme since the biennium 1992-1993. The Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that 26 out of 53 participants in the training programme had successfully passed the final exams since the inception of the programme in 1978-1979.

V.30. Almost half ($413,200) of the total estimated requirements under contractual services ($954,400) of ECA relates to salaries of full-time and part-time language teachers. The Committee was informed, on request, that the language programme is implemented by three full-time language teachers (1 in Arabic, 1 in English and 1 in French) and eight part-time instructors (1 in Arabic, 4 in English and 3 in French). Full-time teachers are paid on a monthly basis and part-time teachers are paid on an hourly basis at the hourly rate of $30/hour effective 1 September 1994.

V.31. As can be seen from table 16A.2, the largest resource growth for ECA is proposed under general operating expenses ($1,390,900). The Committee notes from paragraph 16A.98 that the bulk of the growth ($1,055,000) is mainly attributable to the operation of the new conference facilities, in particular maintenance requirements for electrical, mechanical and air-conditioning systems and interpretation equipment.

V.32. With regard to extrabudgetary resources, the Advisory Committee recalls that it had recommended in the past that causes for a decline in extrabudgetary resources received by all of the regional commissions be identified and examined.[5] The Committee was informed, in this connection, that a sharp decrease in 1998-1999 estimates under the United Nations Trust Fund for African Development is due, in fact, to a change in accounting of the two largest bilateral voluntary contributions, which during the current biennium were recorded under the Fund; such contributions are reflected for the biennium 1998-1999 under bilateral sources and not under the Fund (see table 16A.1).

V.33. The Advisory Committee was also informed, upon request, that an estimated extrabudgetary provision of $3,106,800 reflected under services in support of extrabudgetary activities of table 16A.1 includes: (a) an amount of $1,978,600 relating to the ECA Clinic Fund, which represents an increase of $375,300; and (b) an amount of $1,128,200 for programme support, representing an increase of $120,700, commensurate with the level of extrabudgetary resources expected to be raised. With regard to the ECA clinic, the Committee was informed that since December 1994, the services of the clinic were no longer provided free of charge to staff members, who in turn had started claiming reimbursement from their respective medical insurance schemes. ECA staff, as well as that of other participating United Nations agencies, are provided various medical services, including surgery, dentistry, cardiology, paediatrics, ophthalmology, psychiatry, neurology, radiology, etc. Participating agencies are charged a per capita contribution, which is based on the projected total clinic budget less income from services rendered to staff members. Upon the Committee's request, the secretariat clarified that the reason for the increased cost estimates for the clinic for 1998-1999 was that with the increased income expected to be realized from charges to staff, the clinic was planning to expand its services

by hiring additional consulting doctors, purchasing medical equipment (a one-time expense) and acquiring medical supplies.

Section 16B. Regional Commissions New York Office

V.34. The Advisory Committee was informed that there was no particular significance in attaching section 16B, Regional Commissions New York Office, of the proposed programme budget to section 16A. Paragraphs 16B.1 and 16B.2 provide a description of the activities of the Regional Commissions New York Office. With the exception of small reductions under general temporary assistance ($600), overtime ($1,300) and travel of staff ($4,500), the resources requirements for the Office are proposed at the maintenance level and provide for three posts in the Professional category and above and three General Service posts. The Committee has commented further on liaison offices in Chapter I, paragraph 116.

Section 17. Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific

V.35. The Secretary-General's estimate for section 17 for the biennium 1998-1999, as reflected in table 17.1, amounts to $73,408,100 under the regular budget and $31,353,800 in extrabudgetary resources. The proposed requirements under the regular budget show a growth of $424,600 (or 0.6 per cent) over the revised 1996-1997 appropriations. As can be seen from tables 17.1 and 17.2 the growth is all attributable to the programme of work and to increased requirements, mainly under other staff costs ($367,900) and travel ($151,900).

V.36. As reflected in table 17.3, the total number of regular budget posts proposed for the biennium 1998-1999 is 468, representing a net decrease of 47 regular budget posts as compared with the total of 515 posts for the biennium 1996-1997. This decrease reflects the abolition of 50 posts (of which 24 posts are to be abolished effective 1 January 1999 and not at the start of the biennium), which is somewhat offset by the redeployment to ESCAP of 3 posts from UNCTAD. The Advisory Committee points out that table 17.3 should have contained a footnote indicating the effective date of the abolition of these 24 posts. The Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the proposed budget includes resources for salaries and common staff costs for the 24 posts for the period from 1 January to 31 December 1998. The Committee was also informed that there were 69 vacancies in ESCAP as of 30 April 1997.

V.37. In the course of its deliberations, the Advisory Committee was informed that there are currently 25 gratis personnel (type I) in ESCAP. The Committee inquired into what appears to be a relatively high ratio of General Service posts to Professional posts and was informed that a large number of General Service staff do not perform clerical functions. In this connection, the Committee draws attention to its recommendation in paragraph V.12 above that detailed information on all types of personnel should be readily available in the context of the Committee's review of a proposed programme budget.

V.38. With regard to the redeployment to this section of three posts and non-post resources from UNCTAD for the UNCTAD/ESCAP Joint Unit on Transnational Corporations, the Advisory Committee draws attention to its recommendation in paragraph V.9 above on the need to indicate, explain and justify all proposed redeployments of posts and non-staff resources between budget sections.

V.39. As indicated in table 17.3, the total number of extrabudgetary posts proposed for the biennium 1998-1999 is 70, a decrease of 8 extrabudgetary posts as compared with the total of 78 posts for the biennium 1996-1997.

V.40. The Committee was informed that the proposed programme of work was approved by the Commission at its fifty-third session, held from 23 to 30 April 1997 at Bangkok. At that session, the Commission also endorsed the recommendations of an intergovernmental meeting held in February 1997 which reviewed the conference structure of the Commission including its thematic priorities and subsidiary structure. The Commission decided to maintain a subsidiary structure of five committees, with minor reordering of programme areas. These include the Committee on Regional Economic Cooperation; the Committee on Socio-Economic Measures to Alleviate Poverty in Rural and Urban Areas; the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources Development; the Committee on Transport, Communications, Tourism and Infrastructure Development; and the Committee on Statistics. The Commission decided to further streamline its conference structure by reducing the duration of all committee meetings from five to three days. The Committee on Regional Economic Cooperation and the Committee on Statistics will meet biennially. The Commission also decided to retain the special bodies for least developed, landlocked and island developing countries, which would continue to meet biennially for a maximum of two days immediately prior to the annual session of the Commission. The number of ad hoc intergovernmental meetings will be reduced from the current maximum of 15 meetings per year to 5, with the maximum number of meeting days reduced to 25 from the current 100.

V.41. Moreover, the Advisory Committee was informed that the ESCAP secretariat is in the process of preparing its recommendations concerning a revised programme structure, which would form the basis of a secretariat structure, and will report thereon to members of the Commission by the end of October 1997 through the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives, which meets monthly in Bangkok. ESCAP will endeavour to ensure that the secretariat structure is congruent with the programme structure. The recommendations of the Executive Secretary will be submitted to the fifty-fourth session of the Commission, in April 1998.

V.42. The Advisory Committee points out, in this connection, that the programme of work of ESCAP and the structure of its secretariat, as reflected in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999, may change. The related programme budget implications should be submitted to the General Assembly for consideration. In the meantime, the Committee notes from paragraph 17.6 that the programme structure of ESCAP has been revised from 6 subprogrammes in the current biennium to 10 subprogrammes in the biennium 1998-1999, following the structure of the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001.[3] The Committee points out that the titles of four subprogrammes (2, 4, 5 and 6) out of six subprogrammes of the current biennium have been retained without any changes for

the next biennium, while current subprogrammes 1, Regional economic cooperation, and 3, Poverty alleviation through economic growth and social development, were each subdivided into three subprogrammes to make six new subprogrammes.

V.43. The Advisory Committee was informed, upon request, that the changes in the number of subprogrammes reflect a more sectoral approach to ensure that accountability and responsibility for the delivery of a programme, and for achieving the results intended, are clearly identified. The Committee recalls, in this connection, its observation in paragraph V.3 of its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997,[1] whereby, in the context of its review of the thematic approach to programme implementation, the Committee stressed the need to improve considerably the role of programme managers and their respective organizational units in programme implementation. The Committee welcomes the change towards a more sectoral approach, although, in the view of the Committee, the number of subprogrammes and organizational units of ESCAP needs to be streamlined.

V.44. Although the amount of resources for programme support is proposed to be decreased by $595,500 (see table 17.1), the Advisory Committee is concerned about what appears to be a relatively high share (51.2 per cent) of programme support in the overall regular budget resources of the Commission for 1998-1999. The Committee points out that the high ratio is due in part to the fact that the estimated cost of some substantive activities of ESCAP (see para. 17.102) is included under programme support. In this connection, the Committee draws attention to its recommendation in paragraph V.4 above on the need to review the format of presentation of programmes of activities of the regional commissions with a view to delineating more clearly substantive activities vis-à-vis programme support.

V.45. The Advisory Committee recalls its observation in paragraph V.29 of its report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997[1] that the number of ESCAP publications is excessive, and notes, in this connection, the intention of the Commission to reduce during the biennium 1998-1999 the frequency of issuance of many recurrent publications (see para. 17.7). The Committee was informed, upon request, that the Commission's proposed programme of work for 1998-1999 provides for 193 publications (41 issuances), compared with 292 publications (45 issuances) for the current biennium. The proposed programme budget reflects a few savings associated with the reductions in ESCAP publications: $37,200 for editing of documentation (para. 17.14) and $3,700 for printing of publications (para. 17.38). The Committee welcomes the intention to reduce the number of publications, although, as can be seen, the reductions are not significant. The Committee was informed that the Commission had requested its Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives to review the publications programme of ESCAP and report to the Commission thereon in 1998.

V.46. The Advisory Committee also notes from paragraph 17.7 of the proposed programme budget that the exchange and dissemination of information will increasingly be effected by ESCAP through electronic means rather than conventional publications in hard copy. The Committee was provided with information on this issue which indicated that the Commission intended to disseminate electronically during the next biennium 12 issuances pertaining to 7 subprogrammes (1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9) out of 10. The Committee welcomes the

intention to increase electronic dissemination of information. The Committee was provided with additional information which indicated that the number of page-units of internal reproduction of ESCAP publications for 1998-1999 would amount to 2,522,400, compared with 2,702,500 during the biennium 1994-1995. The Committee trusts that the next budget submission of ESCAP will reflect savings and other benefits resulting from electronic dissemination of information.

V.47. The Advisory Committee also notes from the report entitled "UN 21 - Accelerating managerial reform for results" (A/51/873) that two efficiency projects of ESCAP deal with electronic transfer of information; however, the report does not contain an indication of any savings to be achieved as a result of the implementation of the projects.

V.48. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 17.13 of the proposed programme budget that an increase of $85,300 is requested for the travel of conference-servicing staff from Geneva to service the Commission sessions and other meetings held under the auspices of ESCAP. The Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that since one English and one Russian translator post are being abolished, the increase is to cover the cost of travel of English and Russian translators from Geneva to Bangkok. The Committee points out, in this connection, that among the efficiency projects undertaken by ESCAP and referred to in document A/51/873, is a project on limited use of remote translation in the Language Services Section. The Committee welcomes the project and encourages the secretariat of ESCAP to expand the use of remote translation.

Section 18. Economic development in Europe

V.49. As indicated in table 18.1 of the proposed programme budget, the regular budget resources proposed for ECE amount to $49,310,800 and extrabudgetary resources are estimated at $10,165,500. The proposed regular budget resources reflect a growth of $2,269,100, or 4.7 per cent. As explained in paragraph 18.16, the growth represents mainly the combined effect of the application of new standardized vacancy rates, the transfer to this section of the ECE share of the payments to the International Computing Centre for the operation and maintenance of the mainframe and the proposed abolition of 16 posts (4 in the Professional category and above and 12 General Service).

V.50. As indicated in table 18.3, the proposed staffing table provides for a total of 195 regular budget posts (114 in the Professional category and above and 81 General Service), reflecting a decrease of 16 posts compared with the biennium 1996-1997, and a total of 9 extrabudgetary posts (7 Professional posts and 9 General Service posts), reflecting a decrease of 5 posts compared with the biennium 1996-1997. The Advisory Committee was informed that there were 27 vacancies in ECE as of 30 April 1997 (16 Professional posts and 11 General Service posts). The secretariat of ECE has currently one gratis expert (type I) dealing with energy matters.

V.51. As indicated in paragraphs 18.5 to 18.15, the Commission has undertaken an in-depth review of its programme of work and intergovernmental structure. A result of this review has been a streamlining and rationalization of the programme of work and a reduction in the corresponding intergovernmental

machinery (from 14 to 7 principal subsidiary bodies). In addition, all principal subsidiary bodies are requested to reduce the length of their meetings, to rank their activities in order of priority and to define precise programmes of work for any new related bodies, with a time-frame and sunset clauses. The seven principal subsidiary bodies are also requested to review their own subsidiary bodies with a view to limiting them to two categories: working parties of a standing nature and ad hoc groups of experts which are established for a two-year period with a precise programme of work. This may result in further streamlining and reduction of meetings not reflected in the proposed programme budget.

V.52. The Advisory Committee sought clarification in respect of the number of meetings of ECE intergovernmental bodies reflected in paragraph 18.20 of the proposed programme budget. According to the clarification received, the Committee on Environmental Policy meets three days annually (12 meetings in the biennium); in addition there will be a special session in March 1998 dealing with the preparation for the Ministerial Conference of June 1998 and another in 1999 dealing with environmental performance reviews. Thus, the total number of meetings is 24, as indicated, but not detailed, in paragraph 18.35.

V.53. The reform of ECE envisages two mechanisms that will introduce more flexibility in the Commission's methods of work. The first provides for the establishment of a Group of Experts on the Programme of Work which will meet every two years prior to the preparation of the programme budget submission to provide recommendations to the Commission on adjustments and shifts in the ECE programme of work. The second involves the establishment in the secretariat of ECE of a Coordinating Unit for Operational Activities, the role of which will be to deal with issues and activities that, within the ECE mandate, respond to the needs of only specific groups of countries. As indicated in paragraph 18.23, it is proposed to include activities of the Unit under executive direction and management because they do not relate to one specific subprogramme. The Unit will coordinate or organize seminars and workshops in all sectors, but particularly in areas no longer covered by intergovernmental bodies (see para. 18.10).

V.54. The Advisory Committee recommends that the responsibilities and functions of the Unit, as outlined in the proposed programme budget, should be defined more clearly and steps should be taken to ensure that the activities of the Unit do not duplicate those of other organizational units of ECE.

V.55. The activities of the Commission in 1998-1999 are, as indicated in paragraph 18.11, in conformity with the overall objectives of the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001.[3] However, the reform process has led to a strengthening, reorganizing, streamlining or reduction of activities under various subprogrammes. These programmatic changes will be reflected in the revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 to be submitted in 1998.

V.56. As can be seen from paragraphs 18.12 to 18.15, five subprogrammes (1, 2, 3, 4 and 7) have been strengthened, activities related to the subprogramme on economic analysis have been reorganized, three subprogrammes (6, 9 and 10) have

been streamlined and refocused on a limited number of priority issues, and the subprogramme on industry and technology has been discontinued.

V.57. As can be seen from table 18.2, a growth of $215,100 in regular budget requirements is reflected under contractual services, of which an amount of $189,300 represents mainly a transfer of resources from general operating expenses, as explained in paragraphs 18.132 and 18.133. The balance of $25,800 relates to external production of various publications of ECE. The Advisory Committee was informed, upon inquiry, that the number of recurrent publications of ECE will be reduced for the biennium 1998-1999 from the current level of 101 to 80. In this connection, the Committee requests that ECE reduce the need for external production of its publications by using to the maximum extent possible internal reproduction facilities.

Section 19. Economic and Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean

V.58. The estimate for section 18 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 amounts to $90,245,500 in regular budget requirements and $15,920,100 in extrabudgetary resources. The proposal under the regular budget reflects a resource growth of $134,100, or 0.1 per cent, over the 1996-1997 appropriations. This growth represents the combined effect of the application of the new standardized vacancy rates, the delayed impact of the P-4 post established in the biennium 1996-1997, the redeployment to this section of 3 posts from UNCTAD and the proposed abolition of 44 posts. The level of extrabudgetary funding for the next biennium shows a decrease of $2,672,100, or 14.4 per cent, compared with the estimates for the current biennium.

V.59. As indicated in table 19.3, the proposed staffing table provides for a total of 491 regular budget posts (178 in the Professional category and above and 313 General Service), reflecting a net decrease of 41 posts compared with the biennium 1996-1997, and a total of 56 extrabudgetary posts (38 Professional and 18 General Service), reflecting a decrease of 6 posts compared with the biennium 1996-1997. It also provides for reclassification of two P-2 posts to the P-3 level in the Division of Administration. The proposed staffing table also reflects the redeployment to ECLAC of three posts from UNCTAD. A number of internal redeployments are also proposed between various offices of the Commission; the redeployments are due in part to a decrease in the number of subprogrammes. The Advisory Committee has no objection to the proposed staffing structure of ECLAC.

V.60. The Advisory Committee was informed that there were 71 vacancies in ECLAC as of 30 April 1997 (35 Professional posts and 36 General Service posts). The secretariat of ECLAC also currently has four gratis personnel (type I) and four interns.

V.61. As indicated in the overview to section 19, the Commission, by its resolution 553 (XXI) decided to establish an ad hoc working group to define priorities of the work programme and recommend to the Commission strategic directions for its future activities. The first meeting of the ad hoc working group took place at ECLAC headquarters from 29 to 31 July 1996 to examine

the precise content of the work programme for 1998-1999 and its priorities. The second meeting of the ad hoc working group took place in New York on 5 June 1997. The Advisory Committee was informed by representatives of ECLAC that the ad hoc working group recommended that the activities of the Commission be classified as follows in terms of their relative priorities: 10 per cent - high priority; 75 per cent - medium priority; 10 per cent - low priority; and 5 per cent - lowest priority.

V.62. The table below illustrates the intergovernmental structure of ECLAC and frequency of meetings of its policy-making organs:

	Proposed 1996-1997	Actual 1996-1997	Proposed 1998-1999
Sessions of the Commission	1	1	1
Committee of the Whole	1	1	1
Committee of High-level Governmental Experts	2	0	2
Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee	2	2	2
Urban Housing Committee	1	1	0
Committee on Central American Economic Cooperation	1	1	2
Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean	1	1	0
Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women	4	2	3
Presiding officers of the Regional Council for Planning, Latin American and the Caribbean Institute for Economic and Social Planning	0	1	1
Total	13	10	12

V.63. The Committee of the Whole of ECLAC will continue to meet in New York, as in the past, and the Commission rotates the venue of its meetings among the member States of ECLAC. The Advisory Committee was informed that it was less expensive for the Commission to rent space for a few days of meeting rather than to build conference facilities of its own.

V.64. At its second meeting, the ad hoc working group considered an outline of a new pilot management project to decentralize authority in certain areas of human resources and budget management. The Advisory Committee notes from

paragraph 4 of resolution 563 (PLEN.21) of 6 June 1996 of the Committee of the Whole of ECLAC that it supported the general thrust of the project "which will be developed and described in detail, in order to be submitted for consideration and approval by member countries of the Commission before its implementation". The Committee on Programme and Coordination at its thirty-seventh session took note of the pilot project.

V.65. In the context of its consideration of the proposed programme budget for ECLAC for the biennium 1998-1999, the Advisory Committee also reviewed a note by the secretariat in the document on the pilot management scheme.[6] The Committee welcomes the efforts by the Secretary-General to give programme supervisors greater authority and flexibility to mobilize the human and financial resources at their disposal so that functions may be carried out in the most efficient and effective manner, and in return to require a stricter accounting in terms of the content, volume and quality of outputs as well as overall performance. However, many provisions and ideas reflected in the document, require, in the view of the Committee, further clarification and explanation. For example, with regard to financial management initiatives, it is not clear as to what the parameters of increased flexibility in budgetary expenditures might be and what new authorities in budget implementation are being sought as compared with the existing ones. The idea of negotiating with donors appropriate levels of overhead charges on extrabudgetary contributions and introducing more customer-oriented audit and accounting procedures also opens a number of important questions which need to be answered, including what guidelines need to be in place to ensure that officials of the regional commissions are protected against pressure which may result in the Organization receiving inadequate compensation for its support to activities funded from extrabudgetary resources. It is also important to define precisely what is meant by customer-oriented audit and accounting procedures. Moreover, the project document does not specify which of the financial rules of the United Nations need to be revised and to what extent. With regard to the initiatives on human resources management, the project document does not indicate clearly the role and responsibilities of the Office of Human Resources Management vis-à-vis the secretariat of ECLAC, nor does it indicate whether the initiatives in human resources management were subject to discussions with staff representatives.

V.66. The Advisory Committee understands that, as provided for in paragraph 4 of resolution 563 (PLEN.21), the pilot project will be developed and described in detail for consideration and approval by member countries of the Commission before its implementation. Further, the Committee expects that the secretariat of the Commission will coordinate the development of the project with all parties affected by it, including the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts and the Office of Human Resources Management.

V.67. The work programme as approved by the Commission at its twenty-sixth session includes 11 subprogrammes, compared with 14 subprogrammes in the current biennium.

V.68. The table below provides information on the current subprogramme structure and the proposed structure for the biennium 1998-1999:

1996-1997 subprogramme	1998-1999 subprogramme	Comments
1. Food and agriculture	-	Activities and resources on food and agriculture are redeployed to subprogramme 3, Productive, technological and entrepreneurial development.
2. Economic development	4. Macroeconomic equilibria, investment and financing	
3. Economic and social planning	6. Administrative management	
4. Industrial, scientific and technological development	3. Productive, technological and entrepreneurial development	This subprogramme also includes activities and resources redeployed from the 1996-1997 subprogramme on food and agriculture.
5. International trade and development finance	1. Linkages with the global economy, competitiveness and production specialization	
6. Natural resources and energy		Activities and resources on natural resources and energy are redeployed to subprogramme 7, Environmental and land resource sustainability.
7. Environment and human settlements	7. Environment and land resource sustainability	This subprogramme includes also activities and resources redeployed from the 1996-1997 subprogramme, Natural resources and energy.
8. Population	8. Population and development	
9. Social development	5. Social development and social equity	
10. Statistics and economic projections	9. Statistics and economic projections	

1996-1997 subprogramme	1998-1999 subprogramme	Comments
11. Transport		Activities and resources on transport are redeployed to subprogramme 2, Integration, open regionalism and regional cooperation.
12. Subregional activities in Mexico and Central America	10. Subregional activities in Mexico and Central America	
13. Subregional activities in the Caribbean	11. Subregional activities in the Caribbean	
14. Regional integration and cooperation	2. Integration, open regionalism and regional cooperation	This subprogramme includes also activities and resources redeployed from the 1996-1997 subprogramme on transport.

V.69. The Advisory Committee was informed that no changes were being proposed in the organizational structure of the secretariat of the Commission for the biennium 1998-1999, although as a result of the changes in the lines of responsibilities for the implementation of the work programme of ECLAC, only 12 organizational units will report to the Executive Secretary of the Commission, compared to the current 19.

V.70. Table 19.2 provides details of the net regular budget resources growth of $134,100, which represents mainly a combined effect of increases under contractual services ($626,500), other staff costs ($584,200), consultants and experts ($314,600) and furniture and equipment ($127,400), largely offset by decreases under posts ($736,300), general operating expenses ($686,300) and supplies and materials ($99,100).

V.71. The Advisory Committee was informed, upon request, that the increase in requirements under other staff costs and consultants and experts is due mainly to a shift from using regular staff on established posts to using temporary personnel on short-term appointments, general temporary assistance, and outside consultants and ad hoc experts. This, in the view of the Commission, will allow greater flexibility to programme managers in implementing the work programme.

V.72. With regard to the increase of $625,100 under contractual services, the Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 19.135 that it relates mainly to the projected requirements for the publications programme, for data-processing services and the purchase of software and network services and for the provision of high-end photographic and information services. The Committee points, in this connection, to the efficiency projects being implemented in ECLAC which,

according to the report on managerial reform (A/51/873), could result in savings estimated at approximately $1.9 million. The representatives of ECLAC were unable, however, to identify specific savings in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999, as compared with 'economies' to be achieved against future expenditure. The Committee is of the view that some of the efficiency projects undertaken by the Commission, including the implementation of more cost-effective technology and practices in document production and distribution, electronic dissemination of documents and publications and increased adoption of electronic technologies to increase efficiency in achieving the goals of the work programme, should considerably contribute to reducing requirements for contractual services, especially in respect of the publications programme.

V.73. The Advisory Committee notes that the publications programme of ECLAC is quite extensive and that the bulk of it consists of non-recurrent publications (over 200). The proposed programme budget does not provide information on the number of publications initiated by the secretariat at its own discretion. Furthermore, consultants are also engaged in producing specific case studies which contribute to additional publications arising from their work. In this connection, the Committee draws attention to its comments and recommendations in paragraph V.7 above. Moreover, the Committee is of the view that the number of publications of ECLAC appears excessive and should be reviewed.

V.74. With regard to the proposed activities such as coordination, cooperation and liaison, the Advisory Committee draws attention to its comments and recommendations in paragraph V.10 above and points also to the need to design a method by which the cost and means of implementing these activities could be presented in the estimates in a clear and concise manner.

Section 20. Economic and social development in Western Asia

V.75. The proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 under this section amounts to $49,704,800 under the regular budget and to $374,300 in extrabudgetary resources. The proposal under the regular budget reflects a resource growth of $538,000, or 1.5 per cent, over the 1996-1997 appropriations. This growth results mainly from the combined effect of (a) the redeployment to this section of the resources previously allocated to the UNCTAD/ESCWA Joint Unit on Transnational Corporations (1 P-5 and 1 Local level post and non-post resources); (b) the reclassification of 1 P-4 post to the P-5 level; (c) the application of new standardized vacancy rates; and (d) the proposed abolition of 3 posts in the Professional category and above (1 D-1, 1 P-4 and 1 P-2) and 26 Local level posts. The proposed amount of $49,704,800 under the regular budget also includes an estimated amount of $15,023,500 for recosting, the bulk of which ($14,255,800) is due to the difference in the standard salary and common staff costs between 1996-1997 Amman rates and 1998-1999 Beirut rates.

V.76. The level of estimated extrabudgetary funding for the biennium 1998-1999 shows a significant decrease of $2,147,200, or 85.1 per cent, compared with the estimates for the current biennium. The Advisory Committee was informed, upon inquiry, that no posts are proposed for extrabudgetary funding during the biennium 1998-1999. A clarification was provided in respect of an

extrabudgetary P-5 post reflected in table 20.3 of the fascicle. This post is, in fact, for an individual provided gratis (type I).

V.77. The Committee was informed that the vacancy situation in ESCWA as of 30 June 1997 was as follows: 28 posts in the Professional category and above and 12 Local Level posts and 3 Field Service posts.

V.78. The proposed staffing table of ESCWA for the biennium 1998-1999 provides for 103 posts in the Professional category and above, 160 Local level posts, 3 Field Service posts and 1 gratis personnel post. These numbers reflect the redeployment to ESCWA of two posts from UNCTAD, the abolition of 29 regular budget posts and a reduction of 40 extrabudgetary posts, compared with the biennium 1996-1997. The proposed staffing table reflects also the proposed reclassification of 1 P-4 post to the P-5 level in subprogramme 5, Development, coordination and harmonization of statistics and information, in view of the increased responsibilities of the post, which include formulation and supervision of the programme of work on national accounts, financial and price statistics. The Advisory Committee has no objection to the proposed staffing structure of ESCWA.

V.79. The programme of work of ESCWA for the biennium 1998-1999 comprises five subprogrammes and was formulated within a thematic framework of the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001.[3] The programme of work is also based, as indicated in paragraph 20.5, on the assumption that ESCWA will be operating at its permanent headquarters at Beirut as of September 1997. The Advisory Committee recalls, in this connection, that in paragraph V.41 of its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997,[1] the Committee had noted the Secretary-General's statement that the cost of moving the ESCWA secretariat from Amman to Beirut would amount to $4.5 million. In the course of its consideration of the budget proposal for ESCWA for the biennium 1998-1999, the Committee was informed, however, that the cost of the move is being estimated now at approximately $5.5 million; efforts are being taken to raise additional voluntary contributions for the move. The Committee was also informed that, should the amount of extrabudgetary resources be insufficient to cover the full cost of the relocation, the shortfall would be met from the regular budget, within existing resources, and reported to the General Assembly in accordance with established budgetary procedures. This would be, in the view of the Secretary-General, in line with paragraph 5 (c) of ECOSOC resolution 1994/43 of 29 July 1994, by which the Secretary-General was requested to ensure that the transfer was financed within existing resources and primarily from extrabudgetary contributions and without prejudice to planned cost savings.

V.80. The Advisory Committee points out that, in its view, a disproportionate share of resources is budgeted for programme support. As can be seen from paragraph 20.8 of the fascicle, 47.3 per cent of regular budget resources would be required for programme support, while the share of the programme of work is 46.3 per cent. The Committee understands that this is due in part to the fact that the cost of such substantive activities as information services and management of technical cooperation is currently budgeted under programme support. In this connection, the Committee draws attention to its recommendation in paragraph V.4 above on the need to review the format of

presentation of programmes of activities of the regional commissions with a view to delineating more clearly substantive activities vis-à-vis programme support.

V.81. The structure of the intergovernmental machinery of ESCWA is indicated in paragraph 20.10. The table below indicates the number of meetings to be held by the Commission and its subsidiary bodies during 1998-1999:

ESCWA meetings	Days of meetings 1998	Days of meetings 1999	Total number of meetings
Commission (twentieth ministerial session)	-	2	4
Technical Committee (eleventh session)	-	3	6
Committee on Energy (second session)	-	2	4
Committee on Water Resources (second and third sessions)	2	2	8
Committee on Social Development (second session)	-	3	6
Statistical Committee (third session)	-	3	6
Committee on Transport (first session)	-	3	6
Technical Committee on liberalization of foreign trade and economic globalization in the countries of the ESCWA region (first and second sessions)	3	3	12
Arab conference on follow-up to global conferences	-	3	6
Intergovernmental meeting on transport facilitation across borders through harmonization of norms, standards and related conventions	4	-	8
Total	9	24	66

Section 21. Regular programme of technical cooperation

V.82. The regular programme of technical cooperation complements, as indicated in paragraph 21.2 of the proposed programme budget, assistance available to developing countries under other programmes. The programme is divided into sectoral advisory services (implemented by 8 United Nations offices) and regional and subregional advisory services (implemented by 5 regional commissions). The three main types of technical cooperation activities are short-term advisory services, field projects and training.

V.83. The proposed budget for the biennium 1998-1999 under this section is estimated at $45,921,800, which reflects a resource growth of $6,644,000, or 17.7 per cent, over the 1996-1997 appropriations. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraphs 21.12 and 21.13 that the resource growth reflects an attempt to partially ameliorate the unsatisfactory situation resulting from the budgetary reductions in the amount of $7,438,800 applied to the initial 1996-1997 appropriation of $44,814,700. The breakdown of the proposed budget requirements by sectoral advisory services and regional and subregional advisory services is provided in tables 21.2 and 21.3.

V.84. The Advisory Committee transmits the estimates under section 21 to the General Assembly for appropriate action.

Notes

[1] Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 7 and corrigendum (A/50/7 and Corr.1).

[2] Ibid., para. V.8.

[3] Ibid., Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 6 and corrigendum (A/51/6/Rev.1 and Rev.1/Corr.1).

[4] Ibid., Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 7 (A/46/7), para. 23.17.

[5] Ibid., Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 7 and corrigendum (A/50/7 and Corr.1), para. V.10.

[6] LC/G.1964.